



EXISTING CONDITIONS

Study Area Boundaries

The study area for the Town Center has been defined generally as the area bounded by Edmonston Drive on the southeast, Wootton Parkway, Mount Vernon Place and the Courthouse Walk community on the south, Van Buren Street and Adams Street on the west, commercial uses near Frederick Avenue on the north, and properties fronting on North and South Stonestreet Avenue on the east (see map on page 22). This area, known as the Town Center Planning Area, was established through previous master plans.

The study area contains a mix of uses and development patterns which are not all consistent with the Goal and Objectives for the core of the Town Center. As such, some of the areas described within this Master Plan would benefit from more detailed planning within the context of areas adjacent to the Town Center with which they have more in common. For example, North Stonestreet Avenue and, to some extent, the Metro station environs should be master planned in conjunction with an overall East Rockville and Lincoln Park neighborhood planning initiative. For this reason, the Plan recommends that the Planning Area boundary be adjusted upon completion of those future neighborhood plans to incorporate the planned residential areas into the neighborhood planning areas. Similarly, Rockville Pike south of MD 28 is so heavily vehicular dominated that few people even consider it part of the Rockville Town Center. In fact, portions of the planning area south of Richard Montgomery Drive/Dodge Street are covered by the *Rockville Pike Corridor Neighborhood Plan*.

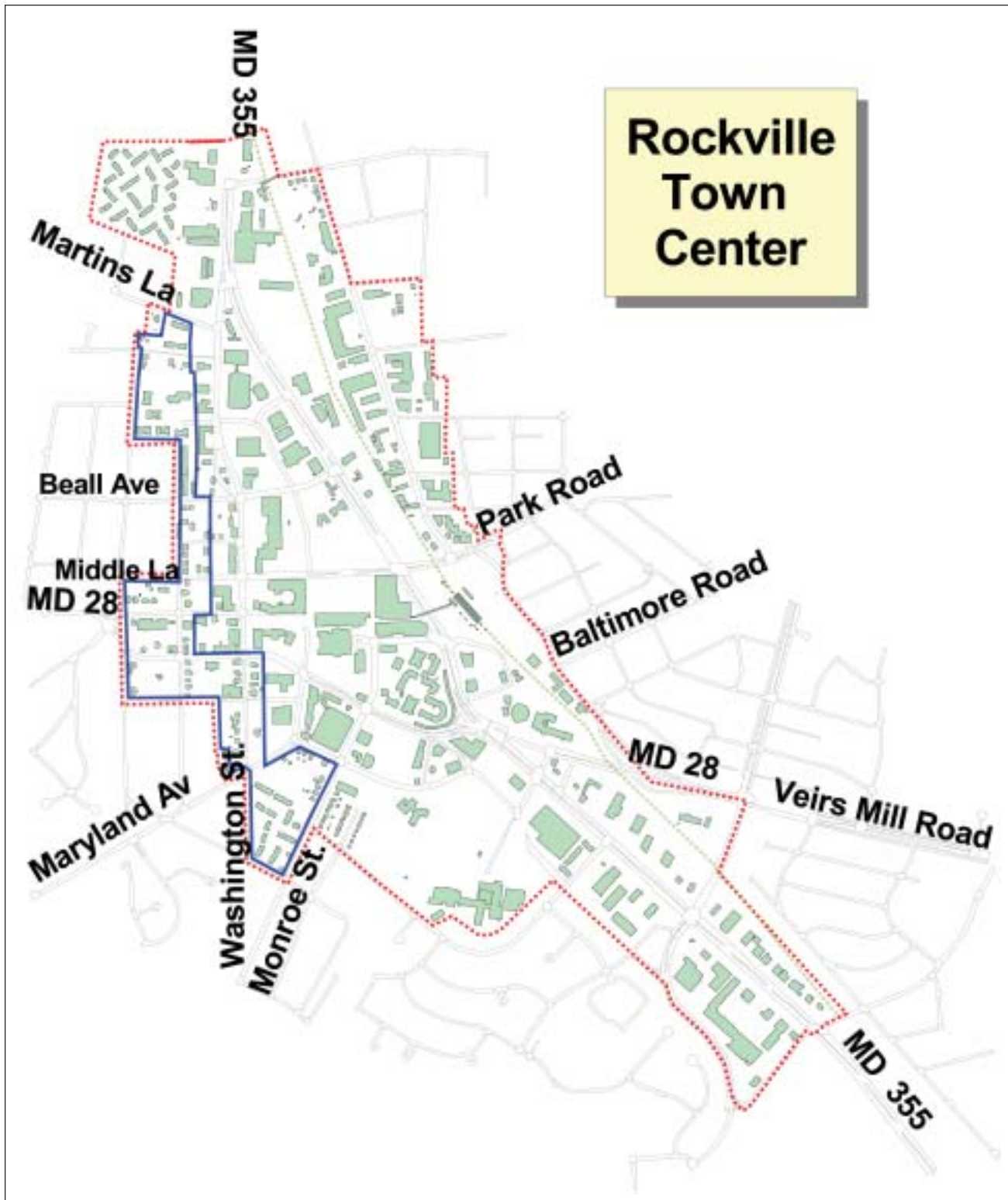
Historic Context

The origination of Rockville dates from before the Revolutionary War. Early Rockville was distinguished by its most familiar landmark, Hungerford's Tavern, that was located near the corner of what is now known as South Washington and Jefferson Streets. It was at this tavern in 1774 that a group of patriots became enraged by the tyranny of Great Britain and selected delegates to attend Maryland's General Committee of Correspondence in Annapolis, one of the meetings that would lead to the First Continental Congress.

It was this early settlement on the main road between Georgetown and Frederick, Maryland that was selected in 1776 to be the seat of Montgomery County government. By the 1780s what was known as Montgomery Court House was named Williamsburgh and contained homes, taverns, a courthouse, and a jail. At the turn of the century, the Maryland General Assembly named the town Rockville, possibly to reflect its proximity to Rock Creek.

When the town was incorporated in 1860, three commissioners governed. Slow growth characterized Rockville until after the Civil War. In 1873, the Metropolitan branch of the Baltimore

In downtown Fort Worth, the development of an 11-screen movie theater at Sundance Square had the double benefit of providing a reason for the downtown worker to linger after 5:00 and of reviving a floundering restaurant and retail district.



Town Center Master Plan Study Area



The B & O Railroad was an important catalyst for early growth in the City of Rockville.

& Ohio Railroad enabled Rockville residents to work in Washington, D.C. In 1888, the 400 residents of Rockville elected the first Mayor and Council. The railroad accessibility and overall growth in the area allowed Rockville's population to rise to 1,110 by 1900. When the Town limits were expanded in 1940, the population grew to 2,047, but beginning in the 1950s the population grew rapidly, reaching 45,000 by 1980. The current population is 47,388, based on the 2000 Census.

Rockville's growth from the County seat of an agricultural community to one of the most economically healthy areas in the country has allowed the City to evolve into a collection of cosmopolitan neighborhoods. The greater Rockville area has become renowned as the high technology, bio-technology, retail, and business center of Montgomery County. However, the core of the City, the Town Center, has struggled to capitalize on the vitality evident elsewhere in Rockville.

Efforts to create an active Town Center have been ongoing in Rockville for decades since the early 1960s when Rockville was the second community in the state to initiate a federally supported Urban Renewal Program to construct a new downtown, including the Rockville Mall. The

project was intended to compete with suburban shopping centers and provide amenities that would draw people into the Town Center; however, the 350,000 square foot, inward-focused mall built over a 1,560-space garage was never successful. The complex project split ownership between the City, which owned the parking garage, and the developer, which owned the retail shops. The mall was never fully occupied and battled design and financial problems after opening in 1972. By 1976, frustration among residents and the business community was evident in an attitudinal survey that found there to be a general loss of confidence and feeling of failure and frustration with the Urban Renewal Program.

By 1990, when lenders foreclosed on the second owners of the Rockville Mall (which had been renamed the Commons at Courthouse Square and then Rockville Metro Center), the City was compelled to participate in a solution to its redevelopment. When Marine Midland Bank bought the property at the foreclosure sale and created Rockville Center, Inc., the City agreed to transfer the title to the parking garage as part of a development agreement while retaining approval rights on the transfer to future developers. Subsequently, the City approved a preliminary development plan for the site which was proposed by Rockville Center, Inc. (RCI), and demolition of the mall began in 1995. RCI's proposal was based on the replacement of the mega-block mall with a traditional block and grid system that could be developed in phases.

The demolition of the mall was concluded by 1996 and work on public infrastructure began to create extensions of Montgomery Avenue to Monroe Street, Maryland Avenue to Middle Lane, and Monroe Street to Middle Lane. The opening of Maryland Avenue and Courthouse Square was celebrated on Memorial Day 1997. The next phase of the project was a 100,000 square-foot retail pavilion on the south side of



Courthouse Square and the Red Brick Courthouse are visual anchors for the Town Center.

East Montgomery Avenue. Regal Cinemas opened there in 1998 and restaurants followed.

Interestingly, the approach that was heralded in the mid-1990s - a market-driven development, but with a financial structure (no developer debt) that allowed the owner to delay construction until “the time was right” - has turned out in recent years to be the frustration of Rockville residents and leaders. Because RCI has not been able to secure enough tenants to begin construction, there is the perception that that project has failed and perhaps “missed the market.”

While demand for office space in suburban Maryland and the metropolitan D.C. area is strong, the Town Center has struggled to attract corporate tenants who have traditionally selected outlying office parks or more established urban downtowns like Bethesda. Fortunately, though, the Town Center may be able to offer more competitive lease rates than the popular Bethesda and recent leasing activity has allowed Foulger Pratt to begin construction of Phase I of its 620,000 square foot, three-tower office project immediately north of the RCI site at the northwest corner of East Middle Lane and MD 355. (Other planned or approved projects are shown on the map on page 25.)

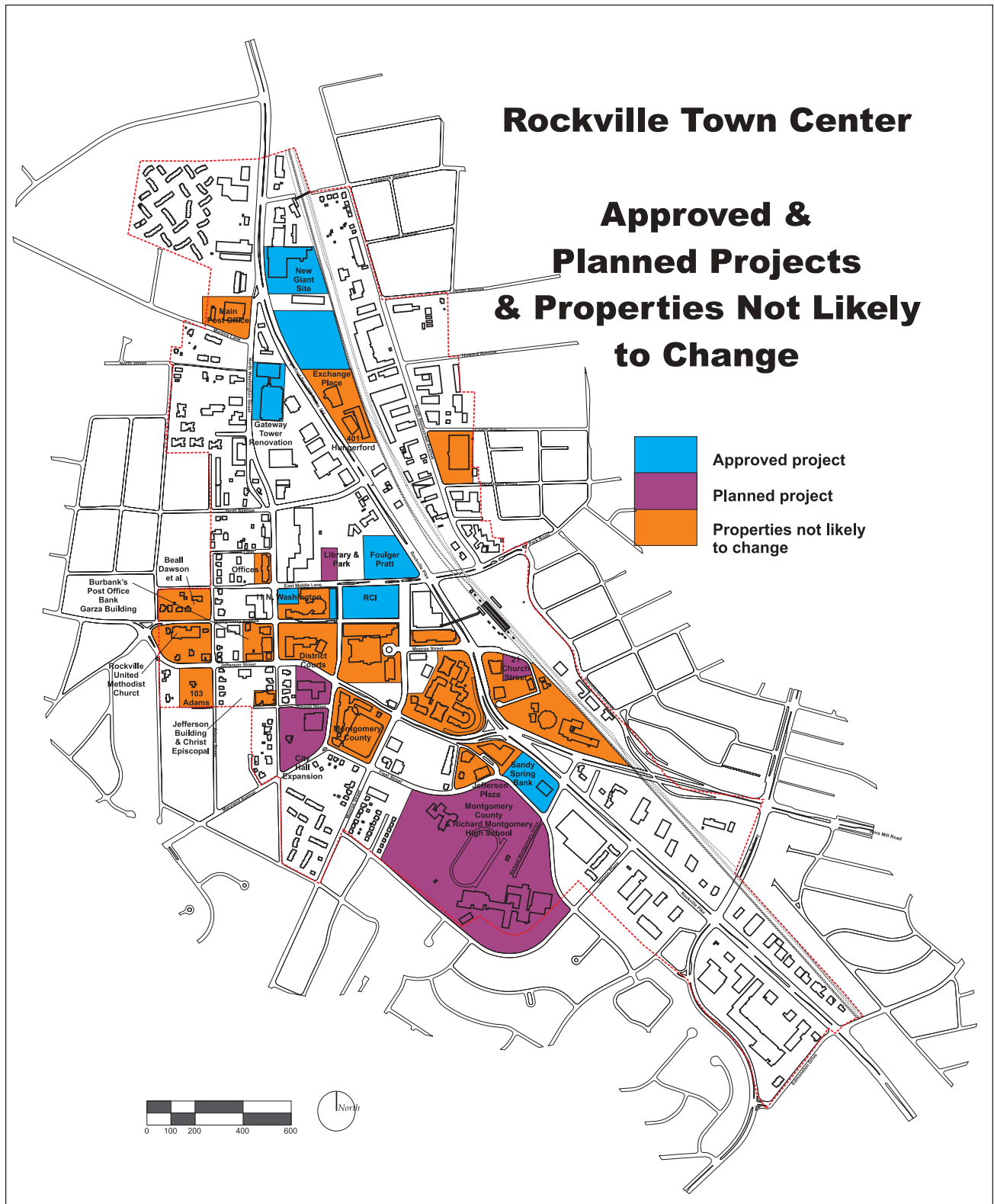
In 1995, the Mayor and Council directed the City Manager to explore methods of strategic planning for all of Rockville and to establish a community visioning process. A Steering Committee of 12 people representing a cross-section of the community was appointed by the Mayor and Council to guide the effort. The Town Center was a prominent issue in visioning discussions associated with Imagine Rockville, reinforcing community support for more immediate and positive change within Rockville’s downtown. The visioning identified the importance of a new regional library to replace the existing overcrowded facility, an ‘alive after five’ atmosphere, pedestrian-friendliness, and appropriate Town Center character. The County is currently developing plans for the new library to be located in the vicinity of Maryland Avenue and East Middle Lane. The City initiated the Town Center Master Plan process in mid-2000 in order to identify additional improvements and projects that could be implemented in the near future, and that would generate additional investment activity.

Sources: City of Rockville web site; Peerless Rockville web site; 1979 Town Center Urban Design Plan; Rockville Center, Creating a New Town Center for Rockville, Maryland from Urban Land Magazine, July 1997; Imagine Rockville: Community Forum Report

Physical Conditions

The 483 acres that comprise the Town Center study area contain a number of properties that can generally be described as falling within one of the following categories:

- Motor vehicle-oriented commercial uses,
- Public and institutional uses, such as schools, churches and government uses,
- Single family residential neighborhoods,
- Single family homes being used as office uses,
- Mixed use areas,
- Predominantly office uses, and
- Light industry.





The Magruder's shopping center is an example of vehicle-oriented commercial uses in the Town Center.

As evident on the Existing Land Use map on page 27, commercial properties of all types (office, retail, and industrial) are scattered throughout the study area. However, the greatest concentrations of auto-oriented commercial retail occur to the north of Beall Avenue and to the south of East Jefferson Street/MD 28 along MD 355. These areas are primarily oriented toward vehicular travelers along Rockville Pike/MD 355. A significant commercial anchor exists within the core of the Town Center on North Washington Street between Beall Avenue and East Middle Lane in the multi-tenant retail center that houses a Magruder's grocery. Most of the identified commercial properties within the core of the Town Center are office buildings with some support retail uses within them.



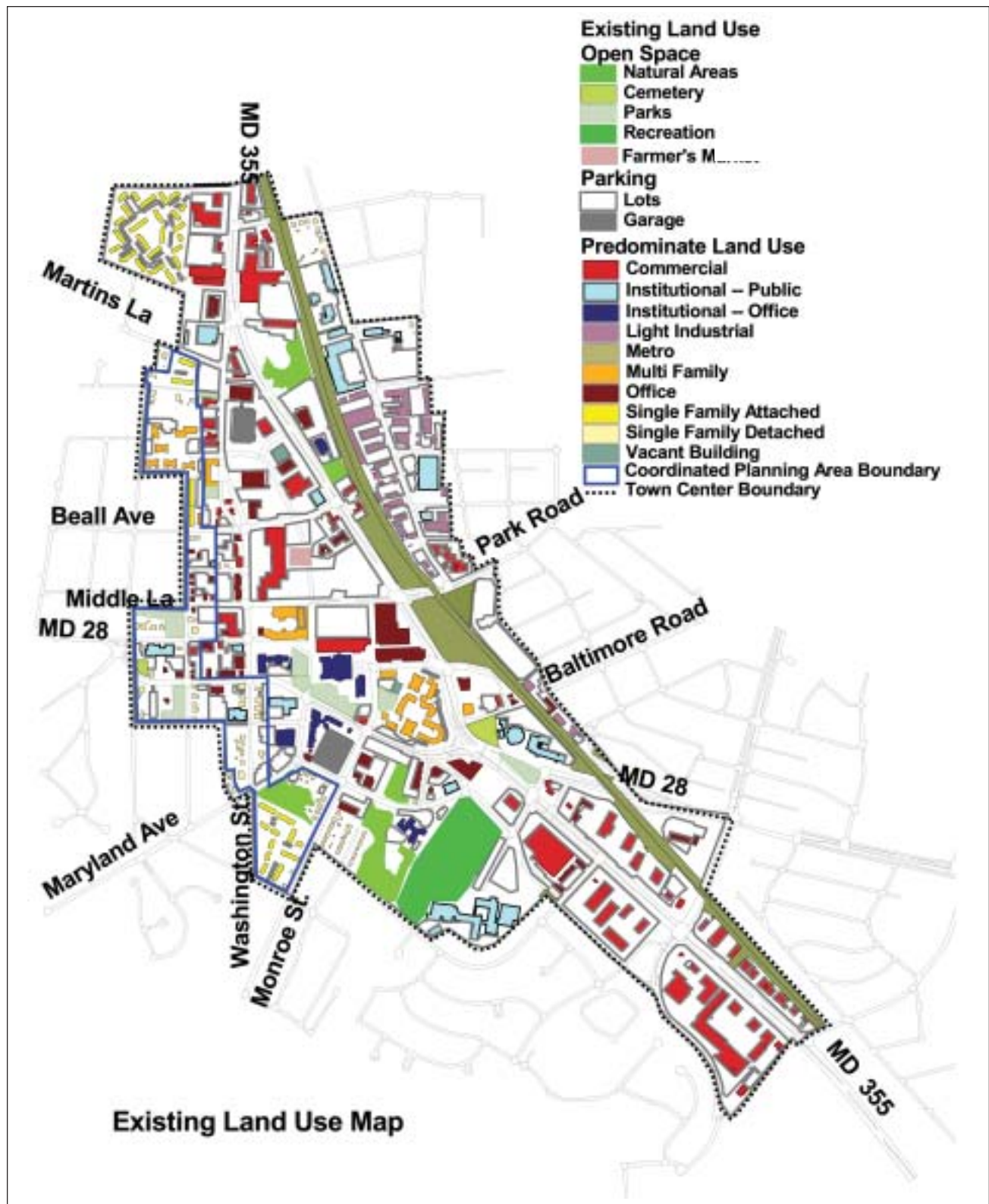
Office uses including County facilities predominate in the Town Center.

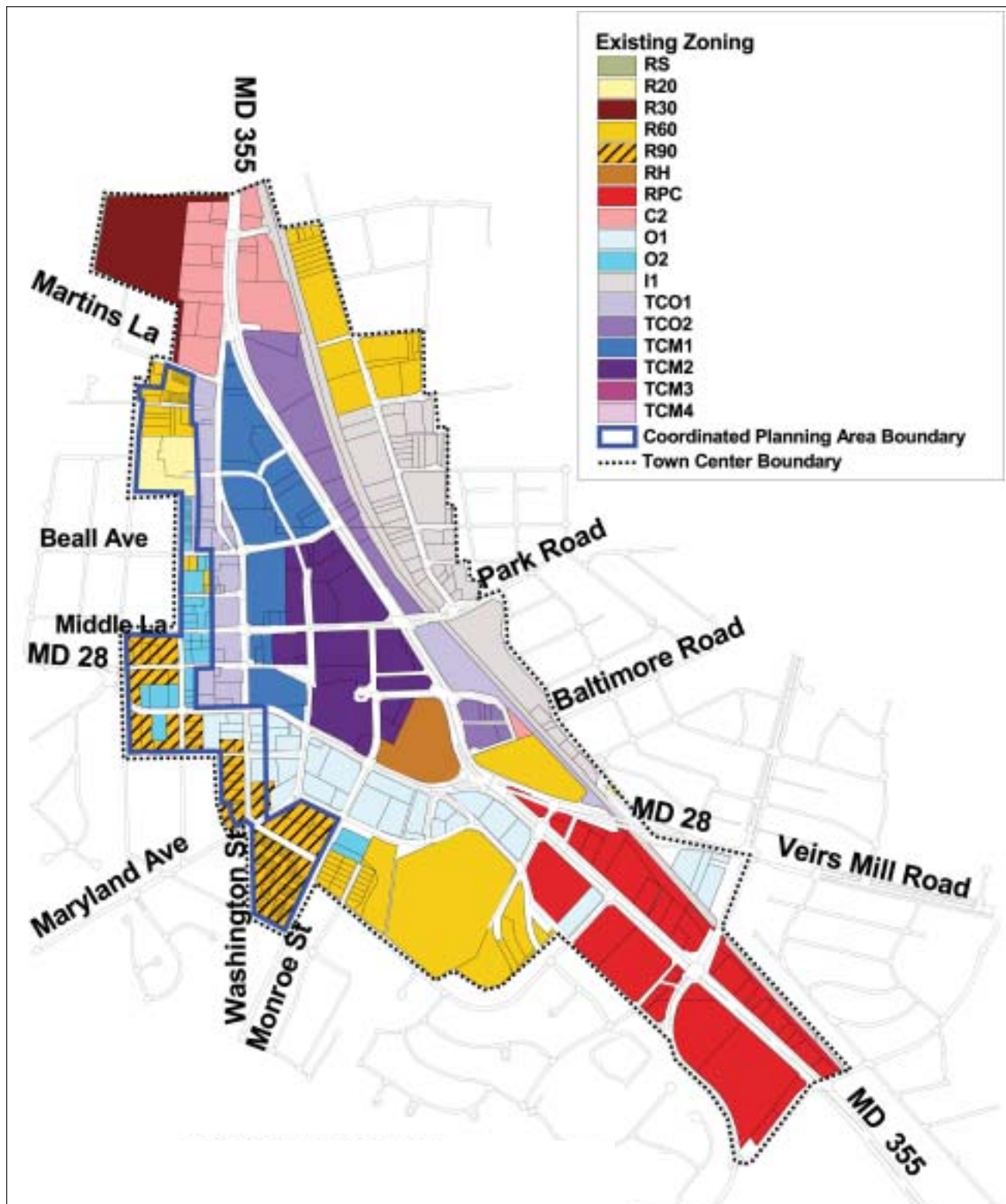
Several pockets of multi-family and attached housing exist within the study area, primarily on the edges of the Town Center, such as College Square, Courthouse Walk, Cambridge Cluster, Heritage Park, Heritage House, and Beall's Grant Apartments. The Victoria condominiums, Town Center Apartments, and the Americana Centre condominiums represent significant residential uses within the Town Center core with more than 500 units among them. Single-family residences characterize the western and southern edges of the study area. In particular, many of the residences along and west of Adams Street are historic. Some residences within that area, in order to retain the historic structures and their residential character, have been zoned for office uses. This condition provides an affordable alternative for tenants and an appropriate buffer between more intense Town Center uses and the residential neighborhoods.



Residents in the Victoria Condominiums create a market for retail shops in the Town Center.

Single family residential neighborhoods also abut the east edge of the study area; however the land use buffer in this case is an assemblage of light industrial uses along North and South Stonestreet Avenue. Included in this area is a significant amount of land owned by the Montgomery County Public Schools that is used primarily for storage.





Existing Zoning



The Americana Centre contains 425 housing units.

The Existing Zoning map shown on page 28 illustrates how the community has been trying to guide development in the Town Center. The core of the Town Center, or the area bounded by MD 355, Jefferson Street, and Washington Street, is planned to be a mixed-use, high-density area. The allowance for the most dense mix of uses is within the Town Center Mixed Use 2 (TCM-2) zone in the area roughly north and south of Middle Lane, from the west side of Maryland Avenue to Rockville Pike. Interestingly, the area around the Metro station between Rockville Pike and the railroad tracks is zoned for office uses (TCO-2) at one half the density of the TCM-2 zone. To the north and west of the TCM-2 zone is the TCM-1 zone, the provision is made for additional mixed uses at a density that is slightly less than the area to the east. The west side of Washington Street is zoned



The Metro station is a critical entrypoint into the Town Center.

for low-density office uses (TCO-1). The east side of Rockville Pike north of Middle Lane is zoned TCO-2 which allows for office uses at a density less than both of the mixed use districts but double that of the TCO-1 zone.

Fragments of unique and distinctive character exist in isolated locations within the Town Center. The historic Red Brick Courthouse at Maryland Avenue and Courthouse Square is one of the primary visual anchors for the Courthouse Square vicinity, which is also defined by the old Post Office at South Washington Street, the District Court building, the Victoria, and Allfirst Bank. This area is one of the existing design treasures of the Town Center and is worthy of a role as a significant organizing element for new development. It is unfortunate that the safest access to this area from the Metro station is the glass enclosed walkway over MD 355 that does very little to enhance what could be a more attractive and appropriate entry into the Town Center.



Example of a residential structure adapted for office use.

A second, but smaller collection of historic structures is found to the east of Rockville Pike and north of St. Mary's Church, where the historic B & O Railroad Station and former Wire Hardware Store have been saved and adaptively reused. The neighborhoods west of Washington Street include blocks of historic homes and several landmark structures such as the Beall-

Dawson House, the Bell Tower Building, and Rockville United Methodist Church.

The character of the neighborhoods east of the railroad tracks has been somewhat preserved by the relative isolation of this area. Although this area is separated from the Town Center and can be accessed only by the vehicular railroad underpass at Park Road, the Veirs Mill Road crossing and the Frederick Avenue pedestrian bridge, it is this separation that has limited the negative impacts of traffic activity on the residential areas. These modest homes many of



The Post Office adds a unique architectural character to the Town Center.

which were built much later than those on the west side of the Town Center, are for the most part in very good condition. Many residents of this area feel that the light industrial uses that line North Stonestreet Avenue are a perfectly acceptable buffer between their homes and the railroad/MD 355 transportation corridors.

Some green space and well-designed streetscape elements exist in the core of the Town Center that make the area highly walkable and easy to traverse for pedestrians. This character has allowed special events such as Hometown Holidays and the Farmers' Market to be well-supported within the community. Pedestrian traffic is not, however, safe and comfortable throughout all areas of the Town Center. Aver-



The East Rockville neighborhood is isolated from the Town Center.

age daily traffic volumes on surrounding roadways such as Rockville Pike/MD 355 (45,000 - 59,000 cars) and East Jefferson Street/MD 28 (29,000 cars) present significant conflicts.

Existing conditions in Rockville's Town Center could not be adequately described without some mention of parking, its availability, and its impact on development activity. The provision of parking has been an ongoing issue in Rockville since the era preceding urban renewal. Because adequate parking is a necessary component of the successful revitalization of the Town Center, the City commissioned Desman Associates to undertake an analysis of current and projected parking in the Town Center in 1999. The results of that analysis, and additional study done by City staff, indicates that there was, prior to initiation of construction of the Foulger Pratt project, a parking surplus in the Town Center. However, it is undetermined whether the extra parking spaces were readily available for use by the general public or convenient to the areas of greatest demand.

Desman also projected future parking needs based on approved development projects and found a potential deficit of 2,467 spaces in the core area based on plans for Rockville Center, Foulger Pratt's Rockville Metro Plaza, 11 N. Washington Street, 21 Church Street, and RCI's residential component. Further study by City staff estimated a demand for an additional 6,015

parking spaces, however, that figure does not include parking estimates for government expansion projects. The State's preliminary plans for a new District Court will require a minimum of 30 on-site and 480 off-site parking spaces, City Hall will need 170 new spaces after its expansion, and the new Library will need at least 180 parking spaces.

Existing Framework Diagram

To summarize the predominant existing conditions in the Town Center, the consultant planning team prepared an Existing Framework Diagram (see page 32) that highlights several key defining features of the study area. The Existing Framework is a tool that illustrates how the major organizational pieces (gateways, focal points, pedestrian and vehicular thoroughfares, etc.) come together to define opportunities in the Town Center. The companion piece to the Existing Framework is the Desired Framework (described in Chapter 5, *Physical Plan*) that represents a culmination of material and discussion with the community regarding the 'big picture' or conceptual physical ideas behind the Master Plan.

A draft of the Existing Framework Diagram was on display at the public open house for the master planning process held in September of 2000, and at a meeting of the Town Center Ac-



Public open space is important for creating an appealing town center.

tion Team also held during that month. Both groups generally agreed with the consultant team's description of the existing framework that illustrates the following:

- Several important, but isolated, Town Center focal points (Magruder's, Metro station, area around St. Mary's Church and historic train station, Regal Cinemas, Red Brick Courthouse, Library, Post Office at South Washington Street and Montgomery Avenue),
- Clear gateways at the North Washington Street-Hungerford Drive split, at the 'mixing bowl', and on Jefferson Street mid-block between Adams Street and South Washington Street where the County buildings begin to appear in the distance,
- Major pedestrian spine along Courthouse Square,
- Major vehicular thoroughfares like Rockville Pike and MD 28/Jefferson Street,
- Critical connections at the East Middle Lane/Park Road-Rockville Pike intersection, at the Frederick Avenue pedestrian overpass, and at the North Washington Street-Hungerford Drive split,
- Fairly compact distinctive core area roughly extending from Jefferson Street northward to the Victoria that is characterized by a high amenity (landscaping, streetscaping, etc.) pedestrian environment,
- Zone west of Washington Street that provides a transition between the business orientation in the Town Center and the residential neighborhoods further to the west, and
- Predominance of automobile-oriented development south of the 'mixing bowl' and north of East Middle Lane.

